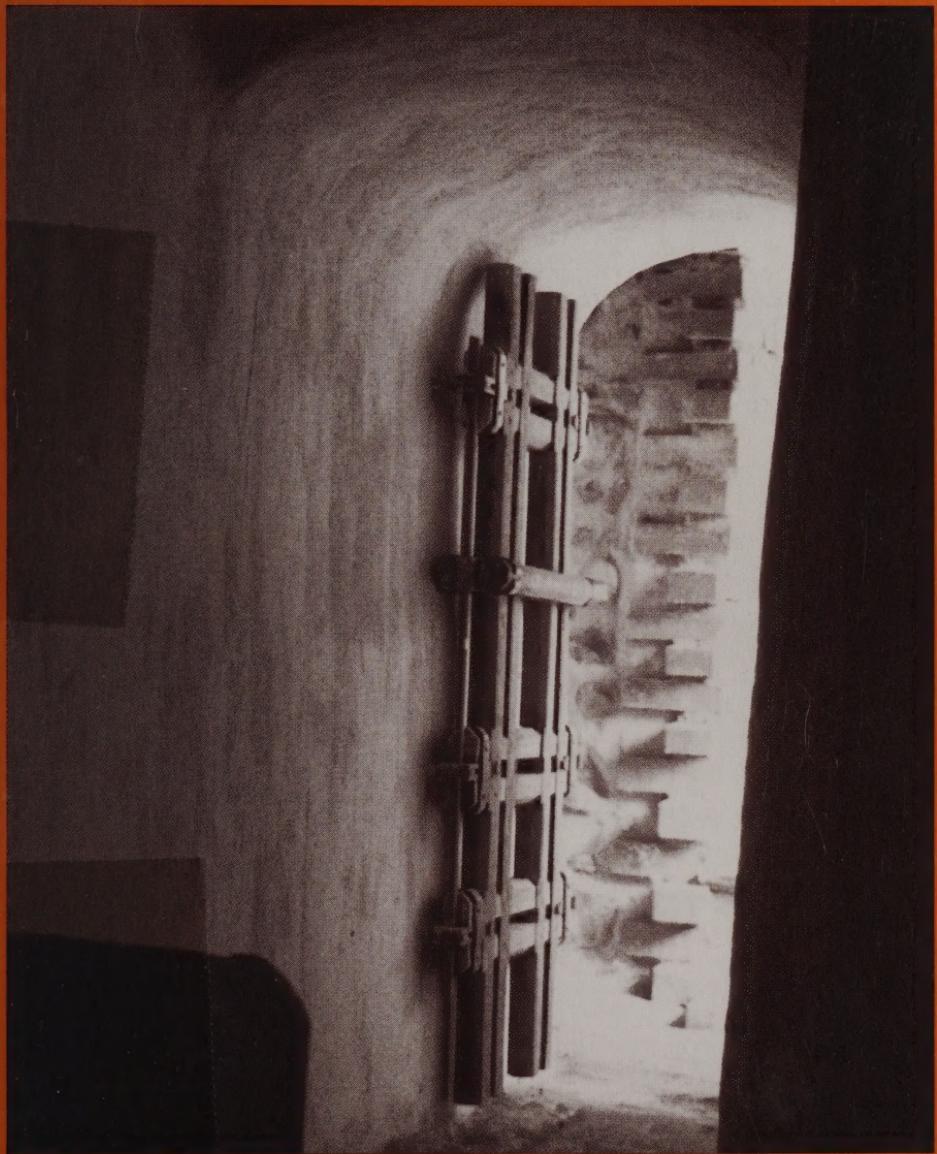


v.50, no. 6 (Dec 1999)

SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ DECEMBER 1999

SACRED JOURNEY®

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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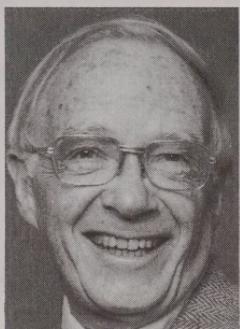
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Cover photo by Kristina Brendel.

FROM THE PRESIDENT



What to say, in this holy month of the Christian year, with the start of the third millennium only weeks away? Review the past two thousand years? Prophesy about the next thousand? Or focus on the only unit of time that we can do anything about—THIS moment. Every moment in which we act out of a deep, heartfelt feeling of compassion for the suffering of others, and a real desire to alleviate that suffering whenever possible, we come closer to Jesus and his vivid teaching, repeatedly emphasized, that God is gracious and compassionate.

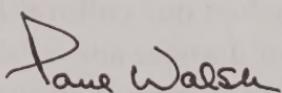
Every faith tradition I know anything about emphasizes the primary practice of love, compassion, and forgiveness. At a meeting of spiritual directors the other night, for example, our group included an Episcopal priest and a Buddhist nun, a former corporate executive, an artist, a psychotherapist and a Jungian analyst. We were men and women of a variety of ages and backgrounds, and we all had travelled and explored a variety of faith traditions in addition to the one into which we were born. What we all had in common was a thirst for the spiritual strength and conviction that would help us and others to break through the thick plaque of ignorance and indifference that builds up and blocks off our essential

goodness, preventing our innate love and compassion from flowing through us and radiating out into the world.

For the saints among us, the truth and motivating force of God's love, compassion, and forgiveness, as manifested in the life of Jesus, are the only reality. The rest of us need all the help we can get to see our way clearly through the fog and pull of illusion and false promises that characterize our culture. Trying to clarify our vision by ourselves is very difficult, to say the least. Fortunately, we have the possibility of finding the help we need in the company of other seekers who are willing to share their experiences, doubts and insights, their questions and revelations with us.

You will meet a large number of such people in the workshops, presentations, and prayer circles at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference/gathering in Princeton, June 16, 17, 18, 2000: monks and lay people, scientists, dancers and musicians, and those whose special gift and calling is to help the rest of us find our way.

I look forward to meeting you and together sharing a wonderful start on the new millennium. Meanwhile, be well, and may the sacred holiday season fill you with joy!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Walsh".

Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



Imagining the coming millennium shift, my husband foresaw himself among throngs of pilgrims in Rome, Jerusalem, or Constantinople. I fantasized about a quiet celebration at my favorite treetop inn in Northern California. Pragmatism eventually led us to plan a more commonplace family celebration to welcome in the year 2000. When the year, the century, and the millennium turn, we want to be with loved ones and hear their answers to the questions posed in this month's *Questions & Answers* feature: What do you hope for? What do you really love? What do you pray for the future?

In this month's interview, Elias Amidon reminds us how important it is to give voice to hope and goodness when our cultural imagination seems focused on stories of disaster and a "sharp-edged and alienated" future. We want more than that from our shared destiny. Read and revel in the *Prayer & Parables* and you, too, will want to stand up and pray so.

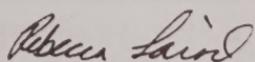
On matters close to home in a *Companions on the Path* feature, Rachel Harris, a workshop leader for our anniversary conference next June, offers this sage advice to parents: "find ways to praise where your child's life seems to be moving." Reflecting on "A Feast of Wonder,"

liturgist and scholar Kathleen Diegnan, gives historical and interfaith perspective on the Christian celebration of the Epiphany. Poet and photographer, Sara Wuthnow, writes of this waiting season when a “sighing in souls” ready us for “the promise of new life.” This month’s *A Transforming Experience* written by Nancy Neal shares an unexpected lesson learned in the sacred space of a local laundromat! Our *Spirituality & Healing* feature transports us to a hospital room where a night messenger teaches a sleepless Katherine Yurchak to say “alphabet prayers.” Lastly and most tastily in *The Ways of Prayer*, Chef and Zen Master Edward Espe Brown declares, “Along with prayer, I cannot help feeling that desserts help.” And I can’t help but saying Amen and pass me a piece of that Red Bartlett Pear Tart.

From all of us at *SACRED JOURNEY*, we send holy, good wishes to all our readers during this festive season. When midnight strikes ushering in the new millennium, I will stand and pray with Rebecca Parker, a contributor to *Prayers for a Thousand Years*:

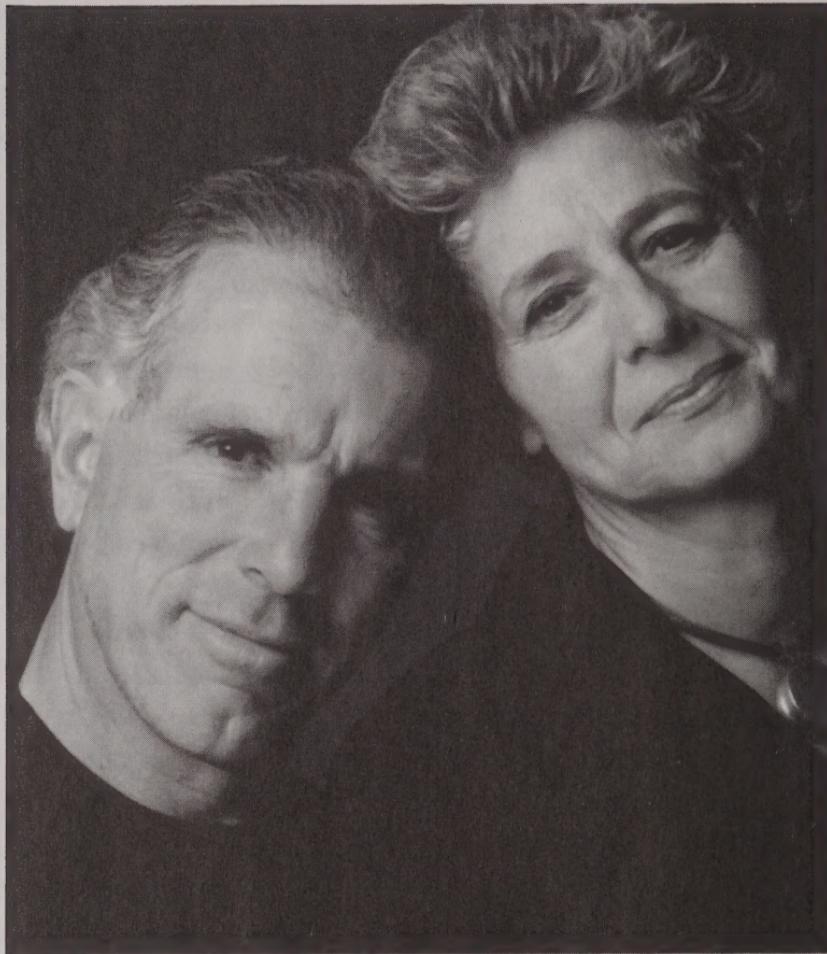
Let there be a season
when holiness is heard, and
the splendor of living is revealed.
Stunned to stillness by beauty
we remember who we are and why we are here.
There are inexplicable mysteries.

Blessings,



Rebecca Laird

Elias Amidon & Elizabeth Roberts



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Prayers for a Thousand Years



Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon

If you could write a letter to the future, what would you say? Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, coeditors of Prayers for a Thousand Years, posed this question to three thousand politicians, poets, and religious leaders around the world. They explain, "We sought out people whose love for the world was stronger than their disappointments." Diverse responses poured in from Archbishop Desmond Tutu to a fifteen-year-old former soldier in Sierra Leone. This collection of prayers, welling up from the hearts of the world, mirrors back something about our hopes and beliefs as we step into the next millennium.

SACRED JOURNEY caught up with Elias as he and Elizabeth packed to leave for "A Millennium Caravanseri," an encampment of Sufis and wandering friends in Andalusia, Spain. From there they travel to Thailand to lead an Interfaith Solidarity Walk. For eleven days participants will stay in villages, live and work with the indigenous peoples, and listen to their stories. Elias says these walks provide opportunity for the spiritual practice of bearing witness—to put aside preconceptions and judgments and enter into each situation with respect and an open heart, with a willingness to ask questions, listen, and offer friendship and prayer to all we meet.

When not traveling the globe, Elias and Elizabeth are faculty in the graduate program of Environmental Leadership at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado and direct the Boulder Institute for Nature and the Human Spirit, a nonprofit organization that trains people in environmental activism.

Prayers & Parables, a selection taken from their book, follows the interview.

Rebecca Laird: What motivated you to take on the daunting task of collecting *Prayers for a Thousand Years*?

Elias Amidon: Elizabeth and I published two previous books of prayer, *Earth Prayers*, a very successful collection of prayers for the earth collected from various traditions and world literature was published in 1991 and was followed by *Life Prayers*, prayers for the different initiations and stages of the human journey. So this process of collecting prayers has been part of our household for years. Our previous books readied us for this project. For me, as a Sufi, one of the central tenets of Sufism is the unity of religious ideals and respecting the deeper commonalities of our spiritualities. By doing this book and our work in Southeast Asia where we gather folks from different traditions, we seek to be a moral witness. The injustices, confusion, lack of orientation, and oppression that we witness in the world call for the presence of many traditions to come together, not to meld the varied traditions, but to stand together in solidarity. That interfaith witness, I believe, can have a real effect on the world. When Martin Luther King, Jr. walked in the South with a rabbi on one side and a Catholic bishop on another, we saw how people who were different could come and stand together in solidarity. *Prayers for a*

Thousand Years combines this quality of moral witness with a living interfaith witness. All of the prayers are from people who are alive and were solicited from people we considered spiritual leaders, moral teachers, and young people who showed wide concern for the world.

Why do our prayers matter at this special time in history?

With this millennium turn coming up, and it's not just December 31st but this whole cusp of time, we are in a period of accelerated change. We are all holding on to our hats trying to figure out what is going on. Stories of disasters and chaos in the world are in our faces all the time. There is a lot of disaffection and depression with people backing off from engagement in the world. In the cultural imagination, the coming world is depicted in many movies as a sharp-edged, alienated world with a devastated, treeless landscape and an exaggerated urban civilization where we are under the thumb of some strange big-brother technology force. It's a strange, bad dream. In the face of these media expressions of our deepest fears of what might be, there is a whole other side of things. There is an incredible resurgence of care and spiritual depth and insight going on in the world. People are standing together to help improve conditions for people who suffer and are oppressed and coming to the aid of the environment. Our hope was that *Prayers for a Thousand Years* would give an opportunity for these voices of hope to be heard. We want to elicit from people what we really hope for and what we really love. If we could imagine that our wishes be put into the air at the beginning of this new millennium, what would we call forth? For more

secular people, I would put it this way: It is twelve o'clock on New Year's Eve and someone turns to you and says, "Give us a toast. What do you want to say to life and for those who come after us?"

What surprises and consistent themes appeared in the prayers that people sent back to you?

We took all of the furniture out of our living room as we worked through and read the more than 1,400 responses we received. As themes emerged, they became the sections for the book. We began with "Visions of Hope." The second chapter, "Opening our Hearts" went right to what is most important, that we begin to be vulnerable and feel each other's pain and not withdraw. A later chapter became "Creating Communities of Peace" since so many people addressed the challenge of learning to live together in our diversity. Many talked about the children as the reason we really do anything important like maintaining civilization and the environment. These prayers are found in "For the Children." Another theme was "The Holy Earth." Beautiful pieces came back recognizing that the earth is sacred. The earth is not just a holding place where we have to stay until we get it right and get to go to heaven, but instead this place here is God's body, and our work is holy. Our work is right here in front of us: we need to harmonize civilizations with the beauty that is not made by humans. The section "Prayers of Solidarity and Justice" contains a spine-tingling prayer by Leonardo Boff, a liberation theologian from Brazil, that describes the Christ of Corcovado statue that overlooks Rio de Janeiro becoming flesh and blood and walking among the poor and exploited and declaring them blessed. Many

people offered warnings on politics and economics and how we need to get democracy right. The final chapter is entitled "We the People" which offers a unique form of collective prayers—great declarations on global ethics for the rights of children, on principals for environmental justice, and for human rights. These collective prayers give witness to the proliferation of people gathering together to make statements that represent what we love and stand for and want to invoke.

When the clock strikes 11:59 P.M. on December 31, 1999, where will you be standing and what will be your invocation for the new millennium?

I will be with a group of Sufis holding vigil all throughout the night in a monastery in England. We will be offering verbal prayers and singing meditation both with words and without words. I'll leave your readers with a traditional Sufi prayer, one of my favorites, which we will certainly be offering that night.

Khatum

O THOU, Who are the Perfection of Love,
Harmony and Beauty,
The Lord of heaven and earth,
Open our hearts, that we may hear Thy voice
which constantly cometh from within.
Disclose to us thy Divine Light, which is
hidden in our souls, that we may know
and understand life better.
Most Merciful and Compassionate God, give
us Thy great Goodness;

Teach us Thy loving Forgiveness;
Raise us above the distinctions and differences
which divide men;
Send us the Peace of Thy Divine Spirit,
And unite us all in Thy Perfect Being.
Amen.



Robert F. Campbell

PRAYERS & PARABLES

Perhaps
for a moment
the typewriters will stop clicking,
the wheels stop rolling,
the computers desist from computing,
and a hush will fall over the city.
For an instant, in the stillness,
the chiming of celestial spheres will be heard
as earth hangs poised
in the crystalline darkness, and then
gracefully
tilts.

Let there be a season
when holiness is heard, and
the splendor of living is revealed.
Stunned to stillness by beauty
we remember who we are and why we are here.
There are inexplicable mysteries.

We are not alone.
In the universe there moves a Wild One

From Prayers For a Thousand Years. Copyright ©1999 by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon and published by HarperSanFrancisco. Copies are available through your local bookstore.

whose gestures alter earth's axis
toward love.

In the immense darkness
everything spins with joy.

The cosmos enfolds us.

We are caught in a web of stars,
cradled in a swaying embrace,
rocked by the holy night,
babes of the universe.

Let this be the time
we wake to life,
as spring wakes,
in the moment of winter solstice.

~Rebecca Parker

President, Starr King School for Ministry, CA

My simple prayer is that in all things I learn to love well.
That I learn to touch the ever-changing seasons of life
with a great heart of compassion.

That I live with the peace and justice I wish for the earth.
That I learn to care fully and let go gracefully.
That I enjoy the abundance of the earth and return to it
from the natural generosity that is our human birthright.
That through my own life, through joy and sorrow
in thought, word, and deed,
I bring benefit and blessings to all that lives.
That my heart and the hearts of all beings learn to be free.

~Jack Kornfield

Buddhist meditation teacher, Spirit Rock Center, CA

Born on the Dutch-Belgian border, I was five years old when in 1914—half a mile from our doorstep—World War I exploded. The barbaric twentieth century had started in earnest. If I am still around on December 31, 1999, I will have survived it in its entirety. Astonishing.

I grew up on a tiny agnostic family island in the ocean of a thoroughly Catholic culture, was still very small when I saw people cross themselves when a funeral passed by. It touched me to the core.

At moments of crisis, of being overwhelmed by unbearable beauty, joy, terrible compassion, I traced the gesture in secret over my heart, under my jacket, it became my only prayer, wordless. It evoked a Presence, undefined. Its upright linked heaven and earth; the horizontal embraced all that lives and must die—humans, animals, trees. The human face itself mirrored the sign: nose vertical, eyes horizontal.

Now eight decades later, forever refusing to label myself a *this* or a *that*, still allergic to all affiliations, it happens at moments of deep emotion, of wonder at being here at all, for once not taking the Mystery of Existing for granted, that I feel my hand moving from forehead to navel, from shoulder to shoulder, still mute, neither petition nor incantation, nor magic, just a hand seeking to touch, to confirm the Presence, the Buddha Nature, the Indwelling Spirit, my only true identity—core of the humanness we share. The Sign, so profaned by centuries of pyres, witch hunts, pogroms has become trans-religious, Sign of the Human, Sign of the Tao, which, Lao Tzu said, cannot be divided, but must be shared.

On New Year 2000—if I’m still around—the mute sign will be my prayer for our species’ survival as a still-Human species, and that of the good earth that spawned us.

~Frederick Franck

Artist and author, Pacem in Terris, NY

You, the one
From whom on different paths
All of us have come.

To whom on different paths
All of us are going.
Make strong in our hearts what unites us;

Build bridges across all that divides us;
United make us rejoice in our diversity,

At one in our witness to your peace,
A rainbow of your glory.
Amen.

*~Br. David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.
Mount Saviour Monastery, NY*

The clock struck midnight and a new millennium began. Grandmother Time, all wrinkled and folded in wisdom, nodded and smiled. "How long is a thousand years?" you ask her. "Let me tell you," she answered, "it's only as long as the blink of an eye or maybe as quick as a heartbeat. It's as short as a sneeze or the snap of your fingers. It's a mere moment in the Mystery."

"But let me tell you this as well. When you love instead of kill, times grows long. When you preserve and create instead of use and destroy, time grows full. And when you give yourself to time, yes, when you open yourself to each moment—not avoiding either suffering or joy—then time is no time. Then time is forever time. Then you will be a stranger to nothing and to no one. Then time will turn your shimmering and fleeting life into love. You will be part of the Mystery that does not cease."

*~Gunilla Norris
Psychotherapist, CT*

We pray for kids on city streets—
even when they rob us.
We pray for purity in teenagers—
even when they seduce each other.
We pray for children who could be learning—
even when they sit in class like zombies.
We pray for the goodness that is buried in young druggies—
even when they are hustling people.
We pray for them all in the name of the light
that shines in the darkness—because
we know that darkness cannot put it out.
We pray for them all in the name of the light
that lights everyone who comes into the world.
We pray for them all in the name of the light who
gives us the substance of things hoped for
and is the evidence of things not seen.

~*Tony Campolo*
Professor of Sociology, Eastern College, PA

Loaf-baking, kitchen-dwelling, breast-feeding God,
hungry and thirsty
we return to your lap and your table again.
Fill us with bread that satisfies,
milk that drenches our parched throats.
Feed us 'til we want no more.

Let your Spirit hang an apron around our necks.
Fashioned by our Lord and friend, Jesus.

Instruct us,
here in the halls of your kitchen-kingdom,
with the recipes: mercy and forgiveness,
compassion and redemption.
Leaven our lives
'til they rise in praise:
Offered, blessed, and broken
for the healing of the nations.

~*Rev. Ken Sehested*
Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, NC

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COMPANIONS ON THE PATH



Parenting: When Separation is a Spiritual Process Rachel Harris

I was driving my sixteen-year-old daughter somewhere, and we were having a fairly typical mother-daughter fight. Aware that I shouldn't blast her unendingly while holding her captive in a moving vehicle, I asked her somewhat bitterly, "Do you want to say anything or should I turn the radio on?"

She responded in a calm, confident voice, "Why don't we just sit with the silence a while and see if anything comes."

I turned to look at this creature as if seeing her for the first time. I was awestruck by her wisdom, and



Rachel Harris, PhD is a psychotherapist in private practice in Princeton and leads workshops at the Esalen Institute, Big Sur, CA and the Omega Institute, Rhinebeck, NY. She is the author of Children Learn What they Live and Twenty Minute Retreats. Rachel will present a workshop on Creativity as a Spiritual Practice during Companions on the Sacred Journey, Fellowship in Prayer's 50th Anniversary Conference to be held in Princeton, NJ, June 16, 17, 18, 2000.

then my mind immediately leaped to, "I must have done something right." It's not easy to maintain an open space for my daughter to exist on her own, separate from me, different from me, having learned from me and separating from me.

Phil Zaleski and Paul Kaufman, authors of *Gifts of the Spirit*, describe the process of nourishing a child's unfolding as "letting go and reining in." With my daughter, I need luck and grace to maintain this reciprocal dance for she is also holding on and pushing away.

Having acknowledged this, I would like to return to the few things I've done right. Chronologically, the first thing is, I owned a hammock. My daughter and I spent a lot of time in the hammock—resting, playing, swinging, listening to music, talking, laughing—from the time she was a baby to, well, now. We could lie in it together and wrap the netting around us like a cocoon.

Another thing is I spent lots of hours hanging out in playgrounds. At first I thought I'd be able to read while she toddled off to play. But she quickly taught me about going down the slide with her, pushing her on the swing, and watching her climb the monkey bars. I surrendered. That was my contribution. I totally surrendered to the sun, the mosquitoes, the varicose veins in my legs, and the sweat with no real cardiovascular benefit.

The other thing I hope I've done is best described in a quote by Richard Lewis, founder and director of the Touchstone Center, "You have to praise where a child's life seems to be moving." This is a far more subtle thing than hammocks and playgrounds, not unlike that of spiritual direction. Thomas Merton describes spiritual



direction as "helping another to recognize and to follow the inspirations of grace in . . . life, in order to arrive at the end to which God is leading."

To be able to do this, I've had to find a quiet place inside from which to dispassionately observe my daughter. Then I can see the little things that lead to her spiritual unfolding. I praised her generosity when she made string bracelets for every kid in her kindergarten. I admired her courage in the face of some cruel nine-year-old girls. I respected her magnanimity when she didn't get a good part in the eighth grade musical. Now I appreciate her work ethic and dedication and applaud her professional commitment to creative expression. I also praise her when she changes the kitty litter or her bed sheets, whenever the miracle occurs. Most of the rest, I try to ignore.

So when I turn to look at her in the car in the middle of our typical mother-daughter fight, I see her sitting calmly in silence, waiting for inspiration to speak, confident we can resolve this. I see her ready to face her future, her own spiritual destiny, quite separate from me.

A FEAST OF WONDER

Kathleen Deignan

Just days after the millennium turns, Christians will celebrate the Feast of Epiphany. Like everything in this universe, the feast of Epiphany evolved into the richly textured and multi-faceted celebration it is today. Liturgists speculate about the origins of this festival which has its source in the eastern church and may date to the late second century. It is a feast older than Christmas, which is a western festival, and, several centuries later, was fused with Christmas to embellish the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus, as the churches began to incorporate each other's feasts into a more developed liturgical pattern for celebrating and contemplating the mysteries of Christ.



While the feast itself celebrates the birth of Christ, it also constellates the baptism of Jesus and his first miracle at Cana, because these are the great and first epiphanies of Christ—that is, the disclosures of divinity, the

Kathleen Deignan is the Director of the Iona Spirituality Institute and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY. Kathleen also is a composer and member of Anima Schola, a liturgical ensemble of the Benedictine Grange. Several wonderful compact discs of their ephemeral music are available by phoning (914) 633-2233 or visiting www.animaschola.org

manifestations of the true nature of this sacred person to the world of human persons.

Liturgists speculate that as well as inviting the faithful into the celebration of these sacred mysteries, these feasts may also have been Christianizations of other festivals: the Jewish feast of Tabernacles or Booths commemorating the revelation of Torah to Moses—a feast of wisdom which comingled lights and the waters of life with allusions to the sacred marriage.

Or it may be a Christianization of the solstice festivals when people celebrated the return of the light and the birth of the sun on December 25. The feast may even owe something to the emperor Constantine who tried to incorporate into the Church's liturgy elements of sun worship, to ground the Christian faith in a richer cosmology. This feature may appeal to us moderns particularly, as we seek to renew and reintegrate our own cosmic sensibility and biblical faith. We too wonder about the primordial Word, sounding the birth of the universe from the great mother star—that incendiary cosmic egg, no bigger than a human ovum, holding in its seed-form all this awesome life endlessly unfolding from that one astonishing star burst.

In the east, January 6 also marked the virgin birth of Dionysus, the god of transformations and revelations, and was associated with legends of epiphanies, in which gods made themselves known to mortals, as did Dionysus who changed water into wine, and taught the way to ecstatic inebriation through an intensification of human experience. There may be gnostic influences in this feast also, focused as it is on seekers and a certain esoteric experience of wisdom and enlightenment.

And so the feast of the Epiphany is a richly layered

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Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey*.

and textured moment in Christian life, played out in a wonderful array of poetic elements: a great mother star signaling sages and seekers to undertake the great journey to seek and find the divine child birthed in obscurity, in vulnerability, in primordiality, so that those who seek can behold divinity in its infancy, in its familiarity, its vulnerability, its novelty, its likeness to us.

In some ways Epiphany is one of the most profound festivals of the Christian liturgical cycle because it ritually signals the birth of the contemplative life. It is about coming to see, to behold, and to be held. The feast is about the sacred gazing which we call contemplation: to seeing and recognizing what it is we actually see.

Remember the last time you simply, silently, beheld an infant, were beheld by an infant: that startling exchange—the wonder, the awe of that encounter: a metaphor, or perhaps the reality itself, of divinity gazing upon us. This is the mystery of Epiphany.

In the Hindu tradition there is a practice called *darsan* which is the experience not so much of seeing the divinity, but being seen by it. Of being held, beheld by the god. It is the gift of gazing, of seeing and being seen, and the marvelous energy that passes between two beings so enthralled. In a sense this is the phenomenon of epiphany. It is the birth of the contemplative life in the human person because it is being drawn into the contemplative life of the divine person who is gazing upon us from every atom of being in this universe. Everything is seeing us, beholding us, waiting for us to behold and turn in recognition.

This is the mystery and potency of the feast of Epiphany, a heralding that everything is manifesting, everything is disclosing its divinity to us, everything is awaiting our discovery, our wonder, our amazement, our awe.



Sara Wuthnow

Surely there is not one among us who would not cross a desert to be so beheld. Who of us would not cross a desert to look upon the face of any beloved? But to see the face of God? How far would we go for such an encounter? What desert stands between us and that state of grace, of bliss?

And yet that is the glory offered in every moment—in obscurity, in hiddenness, in the most intimate proximity. God is in the marvellous disguise of everything.

| Nowhere do we look but divinity is gazing upon us; and nowhere can we rest our eyes that we are not beholding the divine.

How wise we need be to really see.

The Christian life, therefore, is a call to contemplation: to see the divinity manifesting all about us, and being able to really see, to recognize and to reverence the wonder of it, to serve the majesty of it, the need of it—its hunger, its pain, its beauty, its power.

This is the contemplative life, what we are baptized for in the waters of beginning, to quicken this kind of sacred recognition. And as at Cana, we become drunk on these waters of life which are transformed into the wine of deep and holy communion in the energy field of Christ. We come to know a sacred, sober inebriation, which is the contemplative experience: an intensification of life, life to the full.

In this way, we discover ourselves to be wise. We become sages, royal persons in search of the source of royal personhood—oriented toward it, magnetized by it, held steady, directed, led.

I wonder if the Magi who dominate this feast started out kings or if they were not just a trio of *Dharma* bums groping toward wisdom. But the more they kept on keeping on, they ended up royal like the royal one they discovered (who hardly looked royal at all, just a humble, hidden baby in a stable) who was the manifestation of *God-with-us*—God being born again and again within us and about us.

And I wonder if they started out with such precious

cargo—gold, frankincense, myrrh—or if these treasures did not accrue to them as they became more focused on the divine quest, the journey toward the sacred as they sought Christ. Did not their perhaps poor gifts transform, transubstantiate themselves into something unpredictably grand—like water into wine—by means of some deep intention? Is it not interesting to imagine that some base element perhaps burdening them, mysteriously, en route, may have metamorphosed into a precious gift by the alchemy of proceeding on, showing up, going forth on the path? Following the light. Just following the light.

This feast of wonder makes you wonder.

It makes you wonder how we become wise and rich and royal. It makes you wonder about the mother star that guides our wayfaring hearts in this world and how faithful we are to the heavenly light that means to guide us.

It makes you wonder about our own royal nature and how it evolves over time as we keep to our true course. And it makes you wonder about the gift that's forming, the one we really desire to offer, the one which will be distilled of all our desires.

And it makes you wonder. Just wonder—which is, after all, the pulse of contemplative vitality in us, the pulse of wisdom beating within us, transforming us moment by moment, into Magi.

Let us take a moment to let the pulse of wonder remind us of our royal nature and of its source in the mystery of the person of Christ, and to pray with gratitude for the gift that we bear as burden or blessing, which we hope to offer the Holy One in moments of splendid, wondrous recognition.

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE

A Teacher in Disguise

Nancy Neal

Some of our greatest teachers are not found in educational institutions but present their lessons in the classroom of life. They are all around us, teachers in disguise. An important teacher in my life taught me a valuable lesson in, of all places, a laundromat!

When I was a young adult living in a small town in central Illinois, every week I routinely took my laundry to a laundromat near my home. One day a woman entered the laundromat with her daughter, who appeared to be nine or ten years old. I was not prepared for nor proud of my reaction to this little girl, for she was the homeliest child I had ever seen. Physically deformed, her legs were misshapened, resulting in an ungainly walk. Her arms were long spindles and flailed about as if constantly clearing away cobwebs. Her speech



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was badly impaired, and I assumed she was mentally retarded as well. On the outskirts of town, there was a state school for the physically deformed and mentally retarded; I couldn't understand why she wasn't in such a school.

Although I altered my schedule from time to time, it was uncanny how that mother and daughter usually arrived at the laundromat at the same time I did. I put my clothes in the washing machines, and then went outside and sat in my car so I wouldn't have to look at the girl more than necessary.

*God is
in all
and
through
all.*

One day, as I was taking clothes out of the dryer, I turned around and there she was, right smack in front of me. She threw her spindly, grotesque arms around my waist, looked up at me with a twisted smile, and said in her own crude way, "I'm happy to see you."

I froze on the spot, closed my eyes, and silently cried, "Oh, God!" Then, to my surprise, I experienced a magical moment of truth—a moment of clarity, insight, and transformation. In a split second I realized that I was the one who was retarded—spiritually retarded—and was being given the gift of the true meaning of unconditional love and compassion. God is in all and through all, and I finally saw the necessity of beholding God's presence in everyone, even the not-so-outwardly-beautiful of this world.

I opened my eyes and discovered my arms were around the girl. Smiling, I looked down at her and said, "I'm happy to see you, too." It was then that I understood why the mother had not put her child in the state school.

Strange as it seems, I never saw the girl or her mother again. I continued my weekly trek to the laundromat and

looked for them in earnest, but to no avail. The homeliest child I had ever seen was a teacher in disguise. She came into my life and taught me a valuable lesson, and once I had learned the lesson, it seemed there was no longer any need for her presence.

I have found on my journey through life that my greatest teachers were teachers in disguise—my spouse, a co-worker, a neighbor, a homeless person, a teenager, a handicapped person, a stranger, even the family pet. But, then, we are all teachers in disguise.

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The Night Messenger

Katherine Yurchak



Nothing was right that night.
The harder I tried to sleep, the more I
lay awake.

The slant of the hospital bed aggravated my chronic back problem, the pillow didn't fit the nape of my neck, my roommate's faint snoring sounded like bombardments in my head.

Suddenly a diminutive gray-haired nurse, making her rounds at three in the morning, appeared in the dim light beside my bed. With her chin resting on the rail that imprisoned me, she inquired softly, "What can I do for you?"

I grumbled aloud, "I can't sleep in this place."

The woman in white rearranged the disheveled sheets that were badly twisted around my body because of my ceaseless tossing and turning.

While she tended to my needs, I continued my noisy complaints: "I haven't had a bit of rest. I'll be glad when

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I get out of here. Maybe I can leave tomorrow . . . if tomorrow ever comes."

The kindly figure passed her cool hand over my heated brow and whispered, "You should be practicing your alphabet prayers."

The softness of her voice came as a rebuke to my loud laments. Ashamed, I lowered my tone and asked, "What kind of praying is that?"

It was as though the night messenger was waiting for the query, because she wasted not a moment in offering her cure for my insomnia.

"Start with any Scripture verse you can think of that begins with the letter A," she said. "And if you can't remember a verse, use a Scriptural theme. It will work fine. Just keep praying until you've gone through the entire alphabet."

The near darkness in the room couldn't hide my bewilderment from my visitor. But neither did it diminish her confidence in alphabet praying.

"Don't worry about finding Scripture for the letters X, Y, and Z," she said. As she turned to leave, she added, "You'll be fast asleep by then."

As abruptly as she had appeared, she left me. Only the squishing of her rubber soles scurrying down the hospital's corridor sounded in my ears as a reminder of the night messenger's visit.

Desperate for rest, I was ready to accept the peculiar prescription for my sleeplessness. And so I began with the only verse that came to mind.

A—"All things work together for good for those who love God." (Rom. 8:28)

Good? All things? My mind raced to discover whatever pleasantries it could conjure up about my hospital stay.

I reasoned it was good that my husband was there when I collapsed. And even though a bad bout with the flu had dehydrated my body, I did have to admit that it was good we lived only five minutes away from the hospital. Getting immediate treatment had to be a plus.

I whispered a faint "thank you" to the Lord. Even so, I desperately wanted tomorrow to arrive now.

My thoughts centered on my husband. I wondered (no, I worried) about him. He also had been ill with the flu. How was he getting along? I fell into an awful fret about whether or not he was getting the nourishing meals he needed to restore his body to health.

But then a pall of guilt swept over me. I realized that the time I should have been spending in prayer was being stolen from me by my anxieties.

"Lord, forgive me," I pleaded. "There is so much uncertainty in this life. I'm afraid."

B—"Be not afraid; only believe." (Mark 5:36)

The verse, coming in alphabetical sequence as it did, startled me. I recalled that they were the words the Lord had spoken to the woman who had pressed through a crowd to reach for Christ's garment. Now Christ was speaking comfort to me through my alphabet prayer.

It was no surprise, then, that a welcome invitation was offered which I accepted.

C—"Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28)

As I lay back quietly, I became aware that I had never studied Scripture with the express purpose of committing passages to memory. Rather, over the years, my daily readings of the Word of God generally included the prayer that the Holy Spirit would stamp truth on my heart and in my mind. My prayer was heard.

D—"Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." (Luke 6:31)

E—"Every good and perfect gift is from above." (James 1:17)

F—"Fret not thyself because of evildoers." (Psalm 37:1)

G—"God is love." (1 John 4:8)

H—"Have faith in God." (Mark 11:22)

As the verses presented themselves one after the other, I sensed that as I was extending myself in prayer toward God, God was communicating with me.

I—"In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct thy paths." (Prov. 3:6)

"Lord, my desire is to faithfully serve you," I whispered. "Please forgive my surly attitude to the messenger you sent to my room tonight."

My head was sinking comfortably into the folds of the pillow that by now had molded itself around my neck. My roommate no longer was snoring. A solemn stillness enveloped the space around me.

At long last, I was in a state of rest. In peace I prayed on. I dozed and awoke praying . . .

Q—"Quietness and confidence shall be your strength." (Isa. 30:15)

The night nurse was right. While praying alphabetically, I had fallen into a deep sleep long before reaching the letter **Z**.

I was awakened by the clattering of dishes. Tomorrow had arrived. And soon the doctor brought news that I could go home and recuperate. Never had the rays of the morning sun shone so bright.

*You should
be
practicing
your
alphabet
prayers.*

There are times, even in the comfort of my own bed, that sleep eludes me. But when distresses loom large in the darkness, I recall the night messenger and her cure for insomnia. I lie back on my pillow and speak Scripture to God. Praying the alphabet way, I've found, is another means of providing the faithfulness of the Lord in bringing rest to the weary.

ILLUMINATIONS

Why aren't you dancing with joy at this very moment?
This is the only relevant spiritual question.

~Pir Vilayet Khan

The new survival unit is no longer the individual nation; it's the entire human race and its environment. This new-found oneness is only a rediscovery of an ancient religious truth. Unity is not something we are called to create; it's something we are called to recognize.

~William Sloane Coffin

Start small. Rather than trying to love the human race, love whom you love and express that. This will draw creativity out of you and will lead you to the next step. Gradually your capacity to love deepens and becomes more universal. Start where you are.

~John Robbins

For the true believer, believing is seeing.

~Rabbe Nachman of Breslov

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's hunger meet.

~Frederick Buechner

And all will be well and all will be well and all matter of things will be well.

~Julian of Norwich

The soul is beautiful as it is the image of God. Knowledge is the way to learn of the hidden things of God.

~*Origen*

In the beginning, there is struggle and a lot of work for those who come near to God. But after that, there is indescribable joy. It is like building a fire—at first it is smoky and your eyes water, but later you get the desired result. Thus, we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with tears and effort.

~*Amma Syncletica*

For silence is not speaking, nor speaking is not God; fasting is not God, nor eating is not God. Onliness is not God, nor company is not God, nor yet any of all the other such two contraries. He is hid betwixt them, and may not be found by any work of the soul, but only by love of thine heart. He may not be known by reason. He may not be thought, gotten, nor traced by understanding. But he may be loved and chosen with the true, lovely will of thine heart. Choose thou him.

~*The Cloud of Unknowing*

But in the meantime—whatever “the meantime” turns out to be—I have perhaps acquired some wisdom for being on the way. I am not called to succeed, I am called to be faithful. We put our hand into the hand of God and go as far as we can go. If that takes us only part way, then we trust that it is a good place to be.

~*Martha Whitmore Hickman*

Prayer and Dessert Helps

Edward Espe Brown

Throughout the day I offer many prayers as the occasion arises: "May you be happy, healthy, and free from suffering." "Just as I wish to be happy, may all beings be happy. May you enjoy vitality and ease of well-being."

I'm not asking for everything to be better, or for all your dreams to come true, but given that things are as they are and go as they go, I wish for your well-being and happiness in the face of all the changing circumstances. Things quite likely will not go ideally or according to plan, so I wish for the growth of buoyancy, flexibility, and resiliency. I wish for the nurturing of generosity and tolerance.

In the context of Buddhism I do not see prayer as necessarily directed toward a supreme being or higher power. Rather I see it as a clarification and expression of true heart's desire, or what my teacher Suzuki Roshi called innermost request.



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What is it we really want? To know and act on true heart's desire or innermost request usually involves unearthing, sifting, and sorting. Speaking it can help to reveal and clarify it.

Each day I offer a prayer before meals. I like using an ecumenical expression: "We venerate all the great teachers and give thanks for this food, the work of many people and the offering of other forms of life." There are many possibilities: "May this food bring us health, happiness, and well-being." "Just as we have enough to eat today, may all beings have enough to eat." "May this food nourish us (me) body, mind, and spirit." It could be as simple as "Blessings on this food," or "We thank Thee for this food."

To have food on the table is truly a blessing, and one's life can change profoundly by acknowledging one's gratitude and appreciation. As Rilke suggests:

To praise is the whole thing! One who can praise comes toward us like ore out of the silences of rock Everything turns to vineyards, everything turns to grapes. . . .

If you use your verse whenever you eat, even when snacking—it can be silent or spoken—it will help bring you into the present and will have a tremendous effect on how you receive your food and assimilate it. Acknowledging the blessedness of food is also acknowledging your own blessedness, your own capacity to nourish other beings as well as yourself.

Nourishment comes from receiving food (or any experience), fully taking it in, assimilating what is useful, and letting go of what isn't. In Buddhism, what comes into our lives is called *Dharma*, or teaching. In Christianity, all

that we receive can be viewed as a gift from God. Gratitude is called for: "We give thanks for this food, this 'teaching,' this 'gift.'"

Lately I have been reading Larry Dossey's *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*. Dr. Dossey is a physician who began incorporating prayer into his practice of medicine after reviewing scientific studies that demonstrated its effectiveness. He found the evidence for the efficacy of prayer to be simply overwhelming, even though this is one of the best-kept secrets in medical science.

What he points out is that prayer works regardless of religious background or belief. Also, it turns out that the most powerful prayer is not one that aims for any particular result, but one that is more all-encompassing: "Thy will be done," or "May the best results occur."

Along with a blessing or grace before meals or snacks, other eating rituals can be beneficial. "Ritual" in this sense could include sitting down at a table to eat, rather than eating standing up, walking, or riding in an automobile. Another is to turn off the TV and radio and to eat in the company of family or friends, or to focus solely on eating rather than eating and reading, or eating and talking on the phone.

Each of us can determine which rituals are most helpful. In this sense ritual can be seen as ways to do things that help to heighten or deepen awareness. Noticing tastes, physical sensations, feelings, thoughts, and moods will inform or "enlighten" the food choices we make, and our capacity to be nourished by the food we are eating. Giving our attention to the experience of eating is powerful, whether we are eating wholesome foods or unwholesome foods, or are overeating.

*Acknowledge
the
blessedness
of food and
your life.*

Ritual, prayer, your innermost request—please find your own way to bring yourself to your meal, to sitting down at the table and taking the time to eat with gratitude, enjoyment, and gusto. May your endeavors bring you sustenance and strengthen your sense of connection with all life.

Recipe

Along with prayer, I cannot help feeling that desserts help. So with apologies to anyone on a fat-free diet, here is a fruit tart. By their nature tarts tend to be more decorative than pies, and tart dough is much less tricky to make successfully than pie dough.

Red Bartlett Pear Tart

Buy the pears a few days in advance to give them time to ripen. I've made this tart in a variety of ways, but here is today's. A crumble topping underneath the pears soaks up their juices. You could always substitute regular Bartlett pears for the red Bartletts.

Makes 1 (9-inch) tart, serving 4 to 6 (or even 8) people

Tart Dough with Lemon Peel (see recipe page 44)

2 tablespoons sweet butter

2 tablespoons white sugar

1/4 cup white flour

1/8 teaspoon cardamom

1/8 teaspoon anise seed

2 to 3 red Bartlett pears

Make the Tart Dough and press it into a 9-inch tart pan as instructed but do not prebake.

Cut the butter and sugar into the flour along with the



Thomas Shilleau/MIRA

spices. Distribute over the tart dough.

Quarter the pears, core them, and then cut them into diagonal slices. Arrange them decoratively in the tart pan, fanning them out or placing them in concentric circles starting from the outside, or you figure it out. If you wish, sprinkle just a little sugar on top.

Bake in a 375-to-400-degree oven about 35 to 40 minutes, or until the sides of the tart are nicely browned and the pears are tender.

Tart Dough with Lemon Peel

1 teaspoon grated lemon peel

1 cup unbleached white flour

1/4 cup whole-wheat flour

Pinch of salt

2 tablespoons white sugar

1/2 cup unsalted (sweet) butter, cut into 8 to 10 pieces or so

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon water

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Combine the grated lemon with the flours, salt, and sugar, and then cut in the sweet butter with 2 knives or a pastry cutter until a fine meal is formed. (A food processor may be used for this by pulsing.)

For tart dough it also works to use your hands. If right-handed, cup some flour and butter in both hands, then transfer it to your left hand with the palm up and fingers flat and outstretched. Move the heel of your right hand down and away against the mixture, pressing the butter flat between the fingers of your left hand and the heel of your right palm. Repeat as needed to make a mixture with a fine crumb.

Once the crumb mixture is formed, lightly toss with the vanilla and water. This is not intended to form a dough, but a “crumble.” Using a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom, press the mixture evenly against the sides and bottom. I like to press it into the sides first, using both thumbs, being careful to make the bottom of the sides as narrow as the top of the sides. At first the dough should go up past the top of the sides, and then you can use your thumb to pinch off the dough so that it is level with the sides. Then use all the scraps and the remaining crumble to cover the bottom of the pan.



The Season of Waiting

Sara Wuthnow

Life moves deep within
incubating in darkness.
It is a season of waiting
a musing time of year
when suns rise and set
over a barren land.

The rhythm of the season
has come upon the world
brooding in the hearts
of naked trees
and sighing in souls
made ready by tears.

Mary ponders with weary weight
the ember felt but not seen
while nature guards all
dreaming deep down things.
Savor this gestational season
this slowing down
this focusing of energies
this promise of new life.

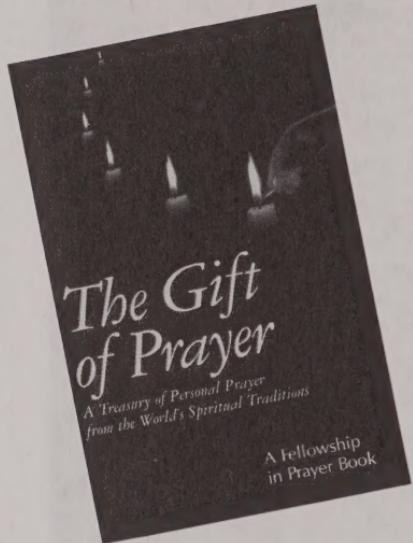
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